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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MAPUTO 000960

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MZ](#) [MA](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES MADAGASCAR AND THE
MAPUTO I TALKS

REF: A. MAPUTO 916

[1](#)B. PORT LOUIS 146

[1](#)C. PORT LOUIS 144

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[1](#)E. PORT LOUIS 132

[1](#)F. ANTANANARIVO 150

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Todd C. Chapman, Reasons 1.4(b+d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Charge met with French Ambassador to Mozambique Christian Daziano on August 18 in the interlude between Maputo I and Maputo II talks to discuss ongoing Madagascar negotiations. Daziano was frank in the discussion, and was not overly optimistic that the Maputo II talks will lead to lasting peace in Madagascar. The main priority of the French government is to protect stability in the South West Indian Ocean (SWIO) region because it is home to protectorates Mayotte and Reunion, and because a sizable number of French residents live in Madagascar. END SUMMARY.

NEGOTIATIONS BEFORE THE NEGOTIATIONS

[1](#)2. (C) According to Daziano, a great deal of negotiations took place before the Maputo I talks began. Several other countries considered for the talks were rejected by Ratsiraka. Mauritius was abandoned because of its complicated history with the French, Ethiopia was out because the altitude was too high for ailing former Malagasy President Didier Ratsiraka, s health, and Angola was rejected outright on logistical grounds. SADC mediator Chissano originally wanted the resort island of Pemba for the talks, but President Guebuza recommended Maputo for logistical reasons, including superior hotel and conference facilities.

[1](#)3. (C) Once the location had been decided, the UN, AU and international mediators negotiated to get the exiled Ratsiraka to the talks. The old president could not afford to travel, and according to Daziano, France graciously lent a Presidential plane to take Ratsiraka, his family and his entourage to and from the talks.

[1](#)4. (C) Each of the four "presidents" came with their negotiating team and a large staff. Chissano insisted the talks comprise only the four leaders and the international mediators; the rest of the delegation had to stay in the hallways, with Daziano who explained that he and the French Foreign Ministry, s Madagascar desk officer conferred with the four Malagasy presidents on the margins of the mediation. Daziano commended Chissano for insisting that all parties agree to not speak with the press, describing Chissano, s negotiation style as "smart," which paved the way for productive talks.

15. (C) Like other observers, Daziano stressed the importance of annulment for Ratsiraka. The former President refused to participate in talks until all prior charges against him had been annulled, and amnesty was inappropriate because it suggests guilt. Daziano said that the AU brought in a constitutional law specialist who expended great effort to design language for Ratsiraka that offered amnesty without using the actual term.

RAVALOMANANA AGREES TO STAY AWAY

16. (C) Daziano echoed other observers' comments saying that Ravalomanana has a strong desire to return to Madagascar (Ref A). The ousted President expressed interest in a SADC-led, military-style forced return to regain entry to the country. Daziano opined that Swaziland's King Mswati supported this idea, and Ravalomanana used the Mswati's support to try to keep the military option on the table. Daziano complimented Chissano's negotiating skill because he was able to convince Ravalomanana a return was not possible because the risk of instability and civil war was far too high.

KEY ISSUES TO RESOLVE

17. (C) The Maputo I agreement states that Ravalomanana will remain out of the country until the security situation improves. Charge asked Daziano who will decide when the situation is safe, and the Ambassador admitted the agreement

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was unclear. He said that Rajoelina believes that he will be the one to make the decision, while the international mediators are under the impression they will decide when Ravalomanana can come home. The Ambassador pointed out that if Ravalomanana wants to and is eligible to run in the election, he will have to return within 12 months to have adequate time to campaign, though he seemed pessimistic that the security would reach any measure of stability for Ravalomanana's return.

18. (C) Another key issue, which could derail the entire process, is establishing who is eligible to run for office in the election to be held in 15 months. Daziano described a gentlemen's agreement established before Maputo I where none of the four leaders would run, but during the summit all four leaders were in agreement that they should, in fact, be allowed to stand for election. The mediators attempted to prevent any of them from running, but the four were consistently insistent, and showed rare consensus on this issue, so the mediators had to let the provision stand. At the ongoing Maputo II talks the parties have the complicated task of determining who will fill which role. Daziano said it was clear to everyone except Ravalomanana that Rajoelina will be president of the transitional government.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

19. (C) Surprisingly, Ratsiraka played a key role as a mediator among the four leaders, according to Daziano who does not think Ratsiraka will run for the presidency, and therefore was more willing to provide diplomatic assistance. According to the Ambassador, Ratsiraka's goals are to return to Madagascar, reclaim his two homes and other assets on the island, and live an honorable life as a well-respected former President. Daziano also thinks Ratsiraka will want to put some of his key supporters into government, including his son. (NOTE: The Ambassador probably was referring to Roland Ratsiraka, Didier's nephew. END NOTE.) Both Rajoelina and Ravalomanana recognize the contracting economy requires a negotiated settlement of some sort to reopen foreign aid and trade, but both men believe they are best able to lead the country. As such, Rajoelina found himself against the other

three leaders fairly often during Maputo I.

¶10. (C) Daziano described ethnic dimensions in the talks, with the Merina aligned against the Cotier. He said that Zafy, a Cotier, played the role of a professor and jockeyed to take control of the constitutional reform process so he could protect the rights of the Cotier people. Daziano said the other three Merina worked mostly as a bloc. (NOTE: He was referring to Ravalomanana, Rajoelina and Ratsiraka as Merina, although Ratsiraka is a Cotier. It is unclear if Ratsiraka was purposefully giving the false impression he is from the Merina clan, or if the Ambassador and the SWIO desk officer from Paris were confused. END NOTE.) At times, the three "Merina" leaders argued among themselves, according to Daziano, who added that Zafy stayed above the fray. Zafy told Daziano that he envisions a U.S.-style federalist constitution for Madagascar, and Daziano believes Zafy will push to take the lead on drafting the new constitution. Daziano also suspects the current age restrictions in the constitution will be removed to allow Rajoelina to run.

FRENCH DESIRE FOR STABILITY

¶11. (S//NF) Daziano said he fears that any military involvement in the talks will increase tensions, and indicated that he believed that the risk for civil war is quite high. He emphasized that the French foreign policy priority is to maintain stability in the SWIO to protect the French islands of Reunion and Mayotte, and French citizens living in Madagascar, Seychelles, Comoros and Mauritius. He said the area is at high risk for piracy and trafficking (REFS B, C, D, E) and that Comoros is at almost a constant state of instability. Daziano then launched into an unprompted monologue on Comoros, repeating French suspicions of Iranian influence on Comoran President Sambhi (REF F). The Ambassador claimed Sambhi travels to Tehran every three months and there are many Iranian religious institutions in Comoros.

FUTURE INTERNATIONAL ACTION

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¶12. (C) Daziano identified economic recovery as a primary factor in French policy in Madagascar, saying that when the AU decides to remove sanctions against the Malagasy government, France will follow suit and resume aid. Daziano confided that even with a resumption of foreign aid and trade, Rajoelina is young and inexperienced and will face the difficult challenge of confronting the split military on difficult issues. The Ambassador would not say if the French have any plans to intervene should military unrest increase.

COMMENT: FRENCH ENVOY PESSIMISTIC ON PEACE

¶13. (C) Daziano was complimentary of U.S. efforts in Madagascar, and lamented there was no room for observers in the Maputo talks. He was well informed on the issues, but was either mistaken or misled on serious ethnic issues within Malagasy society. Nonetheless, Daziano appears to have instructions to follow the Maputo talks closely given France's significant resources in the SWIO region. Post will follow-up with septel readouts of the Maputo II talks.

CHAPMAN